

Realtors

from page 20A

both parties.

When it comes time to sign and close the deal, buyers and sellers are now separated into two rooms to go through paperwork.

"It takes away a little bit of the excitement that a seller feels when they're giving the keys to the buyer, or if it's the buyer's first home, it's usually so exciting," Real Estate One Associate Broker Caron Koteles Riha said. "Now they don't get to meet until after the sale, so that's changed a little bit."

For buyers, sellers and real estate agents alike, it's likely hard to ignore the extra precautions that have been put in place for everyone's safety and to reduce any potential spread of COVID-19.

"When we show properties, it's a little more cumbersome, because we have to get those documents acknowledging they are COVID-19-free before we can set up the showing," Real Living

Great Lakes Broker Kathy Coon said. "That's one thing that's one extra big, giant step we have to do ... but we feel it's important in order to keep everybody safe."

All these changes have happened in a matter of two months, since May 7, when Gov. Gretchen Whitmer rescinded part of her Safer at Home executive order, which deemed the real estate industry an essential business again. Before then, starting in late March, real estate agents were deemed nonessential and were left scrambling to shift their operations entirely online.

While some continued to fare well amid the shutdown, others were met with challenges in trying to keep potential deals from falling through or starting new ones.

"I hosted quite a few virtual showings. I had prepared right as it was all happening. I recall going to my office and telling my staff, 'Be prepared. I think this is going to get bad, so let's take some extra steps to prepare for the worst,'" Koteles Riha said. "Not really

knowing what the worst-case scenario could be, we went through every one of our listings and did a walk-through video."

Koteles Riha was able to close about six homes before her industry reopened May 7, and she took on a few new listings during that time, which she said are closing now.

Being locked in, Coon turned to the homeowners — if they were present — to conduct virtual tours. Some refused, while others were happy to do so, she said.

"Then you go back and think, 'What buyer in their right mind would buy a house with a seller just showing you the good parts?'" she said. "They're not going to show you the leaky basement, or the cracks in the walls or ceilings — stuff they don't want you to see because they want to sell their house."

Coon said some of her buyer clients ended up making offers on homes they viewed before the shutdown, though limiting their list to those homes only added to

the frustration.

As May 7 and Whitmer's announcement arrived, real estate agents across the state rejoiced. Koteles Riha and Coon said that's when the floodgates opened wide with buyers flocking to find their potential new homes.

"It turned into such a strong demand and more of a seller's market," Koteles Riha said.

While higher-end homes still weren't flying off the shelves, houses under the \$350,000 range were receiving multiple offers, Coon said. Koteles Riha added that buyers' needs have changed and adapted in light of the pandemic as well. Buyers are seeking home offices and child workspaces now more than before.

"We're not really sure what's going to happen in the fall as far as kids going back to school," she

said. "Making it more of a home office situation for children and adults is the new thing now. It was out there, but now it's a bigger demand."

While Koteles Riha doesn't think the industry has been negatively impacted, she acknowledged that her industry isn't out of the woods yet and it may be too early to tell the lasting impacts.

"I think the masks will eventually go away, but I think the sanitation (practices) will continue on forever," she said. "I expect that under the conditions we're working in now, we will be dealing with this at least through this time next year."

"I think once we get the vaccination for the virus is when a lot of these practices will be relaxed, but they'll never really disappear, I don't think," Coon added.

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